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ART. VII.—*The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser.*

In Five Volumes. First American Edition, with Introductory Remarks on the *Faerie Queene*, and Notes by the Editor. Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown. 1839.

THAT anomalous genius, Thomas Carlyle, somewhere remarks, that every man has “waited a whole eternity to be born; and now has a whole eternity waiting to see what he will do when born.” He might have added, that a man must work hard during the space which separates his eternities, or the two will close together again, like the waves of a parted sea, and blot out the memory of his existence the moment it is ended. History, literature, and art are the coral-bed which the worm, man, slowly builds up in the ocean of eternity, leaving the impress of himself in his works, a few of which will defy the everlasting roll of the waves. A second eternity is now passing sentence on the works of Spenser, and has already pronounced them immortal.

We have seen, with uncommon satisfaction, the beautiful edition of the works of this great poet, which has been just published in Boston. In execution, it is more elegant than Pickering's, from which it is printed; in form, and in many other respects, it is more convenient than Todd's elaborate edition. It is not a mere reprint from the London copy; but is an original edition, prepared, with introductory remarks and notes, by an American. The editor has modestly withheld his name; but he informs us, that his work has been performed amidst the duties of an absorbing profession, and that it is a labor of love. We wish that more of our professional men would steal away from their cares and duties, to wander in the flowery and attractive paths of literature. There are minds, we well know, now wholly bent upon the technicalities of their calling, — stripped, gladiator-like, for the dusty arena of life, — which, if occasionally given to literature, would do honor to their country, and gain for themselves a fame, that would be echoed beyond the Atlantic. When we think of the industry, energy, and power displayed by men in the various professions in this country, and of the intense action of mind which is going on in our cities, we cannot but reflect upon the splendid results which might be

brought about, if only a small portion of these energies were exerted to elevate our literature.

The preparation of this edition has, indeed, been, as the editor says, a labor of love. It has been done by a man, whose heart was in the work, with a feeling of piety, which has prompted him to place the laurel wreath on the bust of the old poet. This is well. The master-minds of England have deserved, and by God's grace obtain, a double fame ; their children are rising up in this new world to call them blessed. For them, the fable of the isles of the blessed has come true ; here, beyond the western ocean, they enjoy a serene immortality ; their memory is cherished ; their temples are in our hearts ; their praise is on our lips ; their glory, everywhere.

The appearance of the first edition of Spenser ever published in America, seems to offer an appropriate occasion for commemorating the remarkable age in which that poet flourished ; an age which must always be interesting to the descendants of Englishmen on this side of the Atlantic, since it was during that period, that the features of society began to be formed, which have indelibly stamped our own character.

The age of Elizabeth was preëminently distinguished by the operation of just principles, of generous sentiments, of elevated objects, and of profound piety. (Elizabeth, it is true, was vindictive, arbitrary, and cruel.) Two prevailing sentiments filled her mind, and chiefly influenced her conduct throughout life. The first of these was the idea of prerogative. Any assumption of rights, any freedom of debate, any theological discussion, or profession of sentiments, which seemed to infringe on the sacred limits of royalty, was sure to be visited with her severest wrath. She detested the Puritans, from whom she had suffered nothing, but whose republican spirit appeared to her at war with royalty in the abstract, far more than the Papists, by whom her life had been made a life of danger and suffering, but who respected forms and ceremonies, and whose system encouraged reverence for the powers that be, and loyal sentiment toward the person whom they regarded as the lawful sovereign. Nothing but the earnest entreaties of Cecil, and the imminent danger of a French invasion, could induce her to give assistance to the Scottish Protestants, when they were persecuted by the Queen Re-

gent. And even her hatred of Mary could not prevent her taking sides with that ill-fated princess, when the "Congregation" claimed the right of trying their sovereign for alleged crimes, after having deposed and imprisoned her.

The other sentiment, which, in no small degree, influenced the conduct of the great Queen, was her excessive fondness for admiration as a woman. She filled her solitary throne with a dignity and majesty, which could not be surpassed; and it is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of a character, which should have strength and impetuosity enough, even if marriage could have given the right, to overawe her lion-like spirit, and assume the reins of government in defiance of her will. Certain it is, that no such prince then lived. But while the *queen* resolutely excluded all human participation in the lonely eminence on which she stood, the *woman* was constantly claiming the tribute of sympathy and admiration. Her eager desire was to be a heroine, a beauty, the queen of hearts, the cynosure of gallants' eyes; to reign supreme in the court of love and chivalry; to be the watchword and the war-cry of the knight, and the theme of the troubadour.

Here was the source of the unbounded flattery, which was lavished upon her by courtiers, even to the latest years of her life, and which appears to have, at times, actually deceived her, in spite of her extraordinary penetration. To this sentiment are owing nearly all of the few instances of disaster and disappointment, which occurred during her splendid reign. She preferred to risk the safety of her allies, and the cause of Protestantism on the continent, rather than refuse the command of her troops to her favorite, who had entreated it. To gratify another favorite, and insure his glory, she forgot her habitual economy, levied an army larger than she had ever supported, except at the time of the invasion, and sent it to Ireland under the command of a man who was utterly unfit for the place. And when, beset by enemies, harassed by defeat, and overwhelmed with shame, the impetuous and noble-hearted Essex rushed into the presence of majesty as a lover would have sought his mistress, her woman's heart forgave him all. Had this frame of mind continued, had not the resumed majesty of the queen condemned what the woman forgave, the world would have been spared the consummation of one of the most mournful tragedies in

history, and the last days of Elizabeth might have been serene and happy, instead of being tortured with anguish and despair.

The former of these sentiments made her an object of dread, the latter of ridicule ; and both conspired to render her tyrannical. But Elizabeth was not a tyrant in the full sense of the word. She never acted upon the nation with that degrading influence which is always the attendant of selfish, cold-hearted, and perfidious tyranny ; she never had the power, and we doubt if she ever had the wish, to make slaves of her people. She understood the English character ; she comprehended, appreciated, and admired its nobleness ; and she had sagacity enough to see, that this very character constituted her chief glory. A thorough and hearty affection subsisted between her and her people ; an affection which was increased and cemented by many circumstances of a nature not to be forgotten. As a nation, England had been persecuted, distressed, and trampled upon during the reign of Mary. The party which triumphed in the ascendancy of the Roman Catholic religion was small ; the great majority of the people were not very zealous in favor of one side or the other ; they had been ready to welcome Protestantism under Edward the Sixth, and they were not disposed to fight against the church of Rome under Mary. The number of zealous Papists, they who were in favor of the rack and the stake, was not more than a thirtieth part of the nation. The other twenty-nine parts, though perhaps nearly equally divided on the question of religion, condemned alike the bigotry of their melancholy sovereign ; and looked on with sorrowful indignation while the bloody Mary, assisted by a few narrow-minded bigots, was carrying on the infernal work of persecution. It was a sorrow and a shame to all true Englishmen, whether Catholic or Protestant ; and the hated Philip felt the effects of their vengeance till the day of his death.

In these times of tribulation there was one, who shared in the common danger, suffering, and humiliation ; and who, from the exalted rank which she occupied, and the station to which she seemed destined, was peculiarly an object of distrust and alarm to the bigots, who were exulting in their day of power. The gloom which overhung the whole country equally surrounded her ; the fires of Smithfield and Oxford,

were kindled for her terror as for the terror of the people. She had been made to pass through that sorrowful passage from which few ever returned alive, the Traitor's Gate in the Tower of London.

Her course was one and the same with that of the entire English nation ; and the only light which shone upon the darkness, the only hope that cheered the universal despondency, the dependence of all real patriots, the trust of all friends of truth, and the pride of all free and honorable men, were centred in the prison of Elizabeth.

There is no bond so strong as the bond of common perils and sufferings ; and, when the young princess ascended the throne, it was amidst the thankful acclamations of a liberated and happy people, who loved her for the dangers she had shared with them, and for whom she entertained the interest and affection due to fellow-sufferers. This feeling was prolonged in an uncommon manner throughout her reign ; for it so happened, that there was no danger which threatened the Queen during her whole life, that was not equally formidable to the people. So difficult was the question of succession, that the prudent Burleigh never ventured to express his mind upon the subject ; and carried down to the grave the secret of his opinion. Any change would have been for the worse ; as it would either have plunged the nation into a civil war, or have placed a Roman Catholic prince on the throne. The dangers, which menaced the crown of Elizabeth, were alike formidable to the cause of freedom in England and of the Protestant religion in Europe. The invasion of England, which was attempted by the French under the Queen Regent of Scotland, and afterwards the gigantic preparations of Philip, foreboded more than the ordinary horrors of an offensive warfare. These enemies came with the stake and the fagot in their hands ; they came not merely to invade, but to convert ; not merely to conquer, but to persecute ; they were stimulated not merely by ambition, but by bigotry ; they were prepared not merely to enslave, but to torture. It was therefore not a matter of indifference to the English nation whether Elizabeth were to be their Queen, or whether some other prince should ascend the throne. In her reign and hers alone, they saw the hope of peace, freedom, and prosperity. Never, therefore, were nation and ruler more closely and firmly knit together.

The sentiment of loyalty, consequently, was never more sincere and enthusiastic in the hearts of Englishmen than at that period. To the nation at large the Queen really appeared, what the flattery of her courtiers and poets represented her. She was to them, in truth, the Gloriana of Faery land ; the magnificent, the undaunted, the proud descendant of a thousand years of royalty, the "Imperial Votress." She was only a tyrant within the precincts of the court. There, she reigned, it is true, with more than Oriental despotism ; and she seems to have delighted occasionally in torturing mean spirits by employing them upon such thankless offices as their hearts revolted from, though they had not the courage to refuse them. But beyond the immediate circle of the palace she was the Queen and the mother of her people. To the nation at large, too, she was equally a heroine, a beautiful ideal enshrined in their hearts. Living on "in maiden meditation fancy-free," rejecting the proposals of every prince, disregarding the remonstrances of her subjects where marriage was spoken of, there was something in the very unapproachableness of her state which both commanded the respect and excited the imagination of her people. As a woman they regarded her, just as she wished them to regard her, as the throned Vestal, the watery Moon, whose chaste beams could quench the fiery darts of Cupid. She was to them, in fact, the Belphebe of Spenser, "with womanly graces but not womanly affections," — "passionless, pure, self-sustained, and self-dependent" ; shining "with a cold lunar light and not the warm glow of day." This feeling was increased by the spirit of chivalry which still lingered in English society, and, like the setting sun, poured a flood of golden light over the court.

The incense, then, that was offered to the Queen by such men as Spenser, Raleigh, Essex, Shakspeare, and Sydney, the most noble, chivalrous, and gifted spirits that ever gathered round a throne, is not to be judged of, as the flattery which cringing courtiers pay to a dreaded tyrant ; but rather as the outpouring of a genuine enthusiasm, the echo of the stirring voice of chivalry, and the expression of the feelings of a devoted yet free people. The editor of the American edition of Spenser remarks, that "the wits of Elizabeth's reign were an exception to the principle involved in the mem-

orable observation of Tacitus, ‘*Gliscente adulatione magna ingenia deterrebantur.*’” The view we have taken will explain this exception. The wits of Elizabeth’s reign did not insult themselves or lose their self-respect by offering homage to the Queen ; the loyalty which prompted their flattery was a sentiment which rather elevated than degraded the mind, which was responded to by the entire nation, and which had its origin in a chivalrous disposition or in a profound patriotism.

An age of tyranny is always an age of frivolity ; of heartless levity ; of dwarfish objects and pursuits ; of dreadful contrasts ; laughter amidst mourning ; rioting and wantonness amidst judgments and executions ; dancing and music at the hour of death. Such was the frivolity of the days of Nero ; such was the mirth of the “death dance” in the days of Robespierre. Nothing like this sickly and appalling joy could be seen in the time of Elizabeth. There were masques and balls and tournaments at the court, and gay revels as the stately Queen went from castle to castle, and palace to palace, in her visits to her princely subjects. But such amusements did not form the chief object or occupation of the Court of Elizabeth. The Queen, and those who had grown up with her, had passed through too many dangers, and witnessed too much suffering, to allow them to become frivolous or very light-hearted. They had lived amidst scenes of cruelty, persecution, and death. Their childhood had witnessed the successive horrors of the reign of Henry the Eighth, and their youth had suffered from the bloody fanaticism of Mary. Sorrow and tribulation had overspread the morning of their life like a cloud.

Miss Aikin, in the beginning of her charming work upon the Court of Queen Elizabeth, has described the gorgeous procession which filed along the streets of London at the baptism of the infant princess. The same picture also forms the closing scene of Shakspeare’s “Henry the Eighth.” As we look upon the gay and splendid train, marching in their robes of state, beneath silken canopies, and then glance our eye along the map of history till we trace almost every actor in the pageant to a bloody grave, we can scarcely believe that it is a scene of joy and festivity that we are witnessing. The angel of death seems to hover over them ; there is something

dreadful in their rejoicing ; their gaudy robes, their mantles, their vases, their fringes of gold, assume the sable hue of the grave ; and, instead of a baptismal train, it seems like a funeral procession descending to the tomb.

The mournful scenes which the generation who grew up with Elizabeth had been compelled to witness, and the terror in which most of the leading characters of her reign had passed their youth, had undoubtedly tended to sober their minds, and induce them to reflect much upon the great and solemn duties of life. The character of the age was stamped with the dignity which hallows tribulation, and with the force and nerve which the habitual contemplation of danger rarely fails to confer. The same causes undoubtedly promoted the religious spirit which prevailed. While bigotry and fanaticism appeared in a small portion of the nation, it is certain that the age of Elizabeth was marked by the general diffusion of a spirit of deep devotion ; there was enough of chivalry left to keep alive the fervor which prevailed at an earlier period, and enough of intelligence to temper this fervor into rational religion. The feeling of shame at professing faith and devoutness was the growth of a later day ; it was unknown in those times. The gayest courtier that chanted his love-song in the ear of the high-born maiden, and the gravest statesman who debated at the table of the privy-council, were alike penetrated with devotional sentiment, and alike ready to offer up prayers and thanksgiving to the Most High. We are perfectly aware, that the outward signs of piety displayed by a few principal characters are not a faithful index of the state of religion at any period. It is not fair to infer, because Elizabeth devoutly commended herself to the care of the Almighty when forsaken, friendless, an orphan, alone and helpless, she was landed at the foot of the Traitor's Stairs in the Tower of London, or because she returned to the same gloomy fortress when a triumphant queen, to offer up her praise and gratitude to God for his marvellous mercies, that she lived in a pious age. Neither are we to regard it as a sure indication of the prevailing spirit, when Burleigh solemnly commends his son to the Almighty in his letter of advice ; when the chivalrous Sydney is found composing a prayer, which, for solemnity, grandeur, and devotion, is scarcely surpassed in the English liturgy ; when the adventurous Raleigh displays an amount of

knowledge on sacred subjects, that might be the envy of an Oxford professor of theology, or when the city of London presents to the young queen on the day of her coronation, and in the midst of her glittering pageantry, the Bible, as the most appropriate and acceptable offering.

These are not certain signs of a religious age ; but they would pass for something at any period, even if they were mere hypocrisy. They would show, that religion was held in such respect and by so numerous a class somewhere, as to make it worth while for the Queen and her court to assume at least the outward badges of piety. But they have additional force, when we reflect at the same time, that, at the period when they were manifested, the Reformation was making a gradual, but sure progress, in England ; that the question of religion occupied every intelligent mind, and affected the interests of every family ; that the lives and fortunes of millions, the fate of kingdoms, and the progress of intellectual and moral freedom throughout the civilized world, were inseparably connected with the cause of Protestantism.

If bigotry and fanaticism had been prevalent in England, and the opposing parties of Romanist and Reformer nearly equal, there would have been witnessed in that country during the sixteenth century, a succession of atrocities and horrors, compared with which the wars of the white and red roses were bloodless. If, on the other hand, the great mass of the nation had been indifferent with regard, not merely to forms, but to religion itself, we should not have seen the outward show of piety in the highest ranks ; we should not have seen a House of Commons legislating in favor of Edward's liturgy, and a nation turning to worship in their vernacular tongue. Nothing but a widely diffused spirit of piety can account for the character of those miracles of literature which made the days of Elizabeth glorious, and which are stamped with nothing more strongly than their deep and wise religion.

Moreover, in the age of Elizabeth, England was more distinguished for patriotism than any nation in civilized Europe. On the continent the feeling of nationality was absorbed, and the distinction of language, laws, and country, absolutely lost, in the zeal for religious belief. Nations, which for centuries had been enemies, were found leagued against their natural allies ; inhabitants of the same State were divided, and at

war with each other ; the prophecy was literally fulfilled, that "the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son, and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death." "The Palatine," says Schiller,* "now forsakes his home to go and fight on the side of his fellow believer of France, against the common enemy of their religion. The subject of the king of France draws his sword against his native land, which had persecuted him, and goes forth to bleed for the freedom of Holland. Swiss is now seen, armed for battle against Swiss, and German against German, that they may decide the succession of the French throne on the banks of the Loire or the Seine. The Dane passes the Eyder, the Swede crosses the Baltic, to burst the fetters which are forged for Germany."

Nothing of this kind was seen in England. The number of Catholics, who preferred the triumph of their party to the welfare of their country, was too small to be of any consideration. A few fanatics in the college at Rheims, and a few romantic champions of the unhappy Queen of Scots, were the only domestic enemies whom Elizabeth had to fear. With a great majority of the Romanists, the love of country prevailed over all religious distinctions ; and, when the invasion was threatened by Philip, they united cordially with the Protestants in the defence of their native land ; they enlisted as volunteers in the army and navy ; they equipped vessels at their own charge, armed their tenants and vassals, encouraged their neighbours, and prepared heart and hand for a desperate resistance of the common foe.

The energies of the nation were naturally brought into vigorous action by the great objects, interests, and enterprises which the times presented. The effects of the Reformation were felt just enough to produce a bold and free exercise of thought, without kindling the passions to fierce excitement. The storm, which burst with all its fury on the continent, wrapping nations in the flames of civil war, prostrating, withering, and overwhelming civil institutions, and marking its path with desolation, did but exert a salutary influence in England. The lightning was seen flashing in the distant horizon, the rolling thunder could be heard afar off, but the fury of the storm fell at a distance ; the atmosphere was pu-

* *History of the Thirty Years' War.*

rified, the soil refreshed, and the rainbow was glittering in the heavens.

Never in the history of England had there been a time when energy and wisdom were more needed than at that period. The nation was compelled, by the irresistible force of circumstances, to stand forth as the champion of Protestantism. The eyes of all civilized countries were fixed upon her ; some, with imploring looks ; some, glaring upon her with jealousy, fierceness, and settled hatred. Enemies were springing up, with whom peace was hopeless. A popish princess was heir to the throne of Scotland, with a powerful ally ready to support her pretensions to the English crown. On the continent were allies, whom England was compelled to support at the risk of a war with the mightiest empire that had risen since the fall of Rome. And an armament was preparing for the invasion of Britain, of an extent that seemed to render resistance hopeless, by a monarch whose resources appeared inexhaustible, while Ireland was in open rebellion, and ready to receive the Spanish fleets into her ports.

From all these difficulties and impending calamities, the nation gathered a harvest of glory, that would alone make her name famous for ever. It is with a feeling of joy and exultation, that we trace the history of England during these years of terror and of triumph. We behold her extricating herself from embarrassments that seemed endless, and turning them into the means of safety ; encouraging and supporting her allies without exhausting her own resources, and finally crushing the vast engines which were put into operation for her destruction.

The blood quickens in our veins, as we read of the wisdom and the sublime moral courage, of the daring adventure, the romantic enterprise, the chivalrous bravery, and the brilliant triumphs of that age of great men. We see Cecil and Wotton negotiating with Scotland so wisely, as to win the confidence and affection of that nation, and to destroy the influence of France in that country for ever ; Walsingham, fathoming the secrets of the French court, or watching in silence, but certainty, the progress of conspiracies at home, and crushing them on the eve of maturity ; the Queen, with a prudence which seems almost sublime, rejecting a second time the tempting proffer of the sovereignty of Holland ; Drake, circumnavigating the earth, and returning laden with the

spoils of conquered fleets and provinces ; Cavendish, coming up the Thames to London, with sails of damask and cloth of gold, and his men arrayed in costly silks ; Lancaster, dashing his boats to pieces on the strand of Pernambuco, that he might leave his men no alternative but death or victory ; Raleigh, plunging into the fire of the Spanish galleots, and fighting his way through overwhelming numbers, with a courage that rivalled the incredible tales of chivalry, planting colonies in the pleasant vales of the New World, or ascending the Orinoco in search of the fabled Dorado ; Sydney, gallantly returning from battle on his war-horse, though struggling with the agony of his death-wound, and giving the cup of cold water to the wounded soldier, with those noble words, which would alone be enough to preserve his memory for ever ; Essex, tossing his cap into the sea for very joy, when the command is given, in compliance with his earnest entreaties, for the assault on Cadiz, and with that failing of memory so becoming to a brave man, forgetting the cautions of his sovereign, and rushing into the thickest of the fight ; the naval supremacy of England completely established by the defeat of the Armada, and the great deep itself made a monument of the nation's glory.

The boast of the age of Elizabeth was the splendid specimens of humanity which it produced. "There were giants in those days." Individuals seemed to condense in themselves the attainments of hosts. The accomplishments and prowess of the men of those times inspire us with something like the feeling of wonder with which the soldier of the present day handles the sword of Robert Bruce, or the gigantic armour of Guy of Warwick. When we read the beautiful verses "addressed to the author of the '*Faerie Queene*,'" by Raleigh, it is difficult to believe, that they were penned by the same person whose system of tactics was adopted so triumphantly at the Spanish invasion ; who was equally eminent as a general, a seaman, an explorer, and an historian ; and who shone unsurpassed for knightly graces and accomplishments amidst the stars of the court. Such instances were not rare and prodigious. Raleigh was not the Crichton of his age ; if the compliment belongs to any one peculiarly, it is Sydney ; but as we read over the list of distinguished persons to whom Spenser addressed dedicatory stanzas to be "sent with the '*Faerie Queene*,'" we become more and more at a loss to distinguish

the greatest among them ; and we could believe, that many ages had been searched for so noble a catalogue.

The principles which formed society were precisely such as were best calculated for the finest developements of character. The old high, fervid spirit of chivalry was not lost ; there was the same sense of honor, the same knightly bearing, the same passion for glory, and the same admiration for courage and prowess, that had prevailed in the earlier days of its sway. But these were tempered by milder and more attractive virtues and accomplishments ; the clerkly learning, which had held so humble a rank in the days when nobles could scarcely sign their names, had now risen into far higher estimation. Great warriors were now no longer ashamed to know how to read and write ; on the contrary, the possession of learning and literature, the delicate arts of poetry and music, the graces of conversation and manners, were now as requisite to the full accomplishment of the knight, as his horsemanship, or his skill in the management of his lance. In a word, the sterner characteristics of the ancient knight were softened down, in the age of Elizabeth, into the more perfect and graceful attributes of the gentleman. The perfect gentleman was more completely exhibited in the days of Elizabeth, than at any time before ; for the chivalry and the accomplishments, which were then united in the same individual, had been formerly divided between the noble and the churchman or the clerk.

We have gone somewhat at length into an examination of the great features of the age of Elizabeth, because it is only in this way, we believe, that historical knowledge will be of use to us in reading Spenser's great poem. Our interest in the "Faerie Queene" can be but little heightened, by being informed, that Arthegal represents Lord Grey de Wilton ; Marinell, Lord Howard ; and Timias, Sir Walter Raleigh ; and that, under the displeasure of Belphebe, is figured the anger of Elizabeth, on account of Raleigh's intrigue with the "maid of honor." As far as the allegorical characters are faithful representatives of the historical, the connexion between the two may be of some value ; but our confidence in this fidelity is somewhat weakened when we find, that the Knight of Temperance stands for the Earl of Essex, the most fiery and impetuous character of his age.

The "Faerie Queene" is historical in a far higher sense than

this. It is, perhaps more remarkably than any poem that was ever written, a representative of the times in which the author lived. It is indelibly stamped with the signs of the times ; or rather, we should say, the whole form and features of the work are modelled in the likeness of the age. In this respect, the third great bard on England's Parnassus differs from both his superiors. Shakspeare and Milton belong to no age, peculiarly. Their minds were too strong and too vast to be fashioned or even much influenced by their times. They wrote for mankind ; they drew their resources from the living springs, which had been gushing since the world began ; their wealth was an eternity, and to eternity they intrusted their fame.

Spenser, on the contrary, was remarkably the child of his age. His whole character was fashioned by the times in which he lived. His mind was filled with the glory that shone around him. His heart was opened to the spirit of society which prevailed, and he welcomed the influences which poured in from every side. In saying this, we do not derogate from his fame. He was the creature of his times, because the times were distinguished for their grandeur and nobleness. It was his high privilege, that the sure road to greatness was to conform to the spirit of his times ; to rise up to the stature of their robust manhood. The tide in the affairs of men was then setting bravely onward to fortune ; and he had only to throw himself, trustingly and fearlessly, upon its bosom, sure to be borne triumphantly forward to greatness and fame. " Upon the beached verge " of that proud flood has he set up " his everlasting mansion," and thither may all men come to " read their oracle."

Were we called upon to characterize the age in which Spenser lived, by a single word, we could find none that would better express its combined attributes, than the word which the poet uses in describing his principal hero ; " In the person of Prince Arthure," says he, in his letter to Raleigh, " I set forth magnificence." The age of Elizabeth was distinguished by magnificence, in the highest sense of the word, by the most brilliant display of great qualities of all kinds ; and the hero of the " Faerie Queene " seems to be the personification of the splendid attributes of the age. A prevailing sentiment, in the mind of Spenser, was the perfectness of character to which the gentlemen of his time aspired,

and on this model he fashioned his hero. He observes, that "the general end, therefore, of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in gentle and virtuous discipline." And again ; "I labor to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve moral virtues." And as we read the gorgeous description of the prince, when he first meets the forsaken Una, we could fancy, that the magnificent characteristics of the golden age of England had blended together, and blazed forth in one dazzling form before us.

The whole poem of the "*Faerie Queene*" is a faithful mirror of the times. It is filled with the prevailing sentiments, the loyalty and the gallantry, the bravery, the wit, the learning, the patriotism, and the piety, which distinguished the reign of Elizabeth. And we form a better idea of the spirit of the times from this poem, which bears their impress so deeply, than from the most elaborate historical descriptions. In the Museum at Naples, a mould of ashes is preserved, which fell upon the breast of a female, who expired in Pompeii. So complete is the impression, that it not only displays in perfection the beautiful form of the hapless girl, but even shows the texture of the delicate dress in which she was veiled ; and, but for the haste of the workmen, the mould of her face might have been equally well preserved. Now the same perfect idea, which the mould of ashes conveys to us of the beauty of the Pompeian woman, do we receive from Spenser's poem, with regard to the features of his age. It bears the impress of life ; the form was sealed while yet the heart was beating, while the glow of health was on the cheek, and the warm current chasing through the veins.

To enjoy the works of Spenser fully, particularly the "*Faerie Queene*," they should be read, at least, three times, using a different edition each time. For the first reading, we would have a copy with no other explanations than a glossary, printed as in the new edition, at the bottom of the page. We would forget, if possible, that there is any allegory, or any historical allusion. We would read in faith ; we would see nothing in the various characters but brave warriors and fair dames ; magicians, witches, giants, and monsters ; nothing in the scenes but the wondrous fairy-land ; nothing in the adventures but battles and flights, love, conquest, and glory. We would yield ourselves up

with a child's trusting spirit to the guidance of the great magician, and follow him with wonder in our eyes, and faith in our hearts, through his wide domains.

This, we believe, to be the wisest way to read Spenser. The editor remarks, that " 'the Faerie Queene' is the delight of imaginative youth, and of men who have preserved in manhood the freshness of early feeling, and ceased not 'to reverence the dreams of their youth.' He, who at forty reads the 'Faerie Queene' with as much delight as at twenty, is pretty sure to be a wise and a happy man." But if such men there be, they will certainly be found among those who read the poem for its romance, for the story, for the stirring adventure; whom it rouses as the sound of the trumpet; and to whom the allegory and the history come as an after-thought of light import, the gauze-covering with which the statue is partly veiled.*

For the second reading, which should not very soon succeed the first, we would employ an edition with comments explaining the allegory. But here we would bear in mind the remark of the editor, that although the "Faerie Queene" "be an allegorical poem, it is only so to a certain extent, and to a limited degree. The poet starts with giving form and substance to certain abstractions of the mind; but, as he goes on, and kindles with the progress of the narrative, he either forgets, or voluntarily departs from the allegorical character. The interest, too, which the reader feels, is a warm, flesh-and-blood interest, not in the delineation of a virtue, but in the adventures of a knight or lady. We may put the allegory aside, and the poem will lose little or nothing of its charm."

Many persons, as the editor remarks, have been deterred from reading the poem by a dread of the mysterious allegory. But there is another kind of terror equally to be guarded against, which makes us slaves of the allegory, and engages us in a busy search for hidden meanings where there are none; so that, while we are grasping at the shadow, we lose sight of the real and substantial beauties of the poem. The man

* Pope makes this remark with regard to his own enjoyment of the poem; "There is something in Spenser, that pleases one as strongly in one's old age, as it did in one's youth. I read the 'Faerie Queene' when I was about twelve with infinite delight, and I think it gave me as much when I read it over about a year ago." Pope wrote this at the age of fifty-four.

who binds himself to an exclusive search for allegory, may have a philosophical, but certainly not a poetical mind.

For the third reading of Spenser, we would have an edition which should explain the historical, and the less obvious classical allusions ; though, in regard to the former, " we agree with the editor in his observation, that " the general reader, especially on this side of the water, loses little or nothing by his ignorance of allusions to the forgotten events and obsolete scandal of a by-gone age. The obvious allusions are not to be mistaken ; and the more obscure ones can only rest upon conjecture, which may, or may not, be correct."

With regard to the classical allusions, most of them will be obvious to the scholar ; but it is important that they should be explained to the reader, who is not familiar with the mythology and literature of Greece and Rome, as otherwise many of the beauties of Spenser would pass unnoticed. They are not to be pointed out merely for the sake of showing that Spenser was a rich classical scholar ; this would add little or nothing to his fame ; but because it often happens, that a simile, a figure, a form of expression, or a thought, which, if supposed to be the poet's own would seem affected, far-fetched, and absurd, becomes exquisite as borrowed from another writer. Nothing, however, can more seriously injure the effect of the poem, than an undue anxiety to detect classical allusions ; the pedantry of the commentator which places the chief value of the work in the scholastic erudition it displays, and the vanity which prompts to a parade of learning in the discovery of hidden references to classic sources, are as contemptible, as they are destructive to the satisfaction of all readers who are not equally vain and pedantic. On this subject we shall have more to say presently.

We cannot forbear repeating here, that the great object of the reader should be the poetry, the story, the work as a production of art ; he should study the text far more than the notes and comments. If he becomes fascinated with the adventure without thinking of allegory, or history, or ancient lore, if he is swept along the majestic stream of verse, without stopping to sound its depths or explore its bed, he will be the happiest and the wisest reader. Those who are keenly bent upon discovering all the hidden significance of the poem, will find out, perhaps too late, that this is not the true

way to enjoy it. Like the Callender in the Arabian tale, who looked down into the mines and caverns of the earth and beheld all its secret treasures, but, blinded by his gaze, could never again behold the fair face of nature, they may discern the concealed treasures of allegory and classic learning, but they will fail to be impressed with the external beauty and finish of the work.

These remarks were suggested to us by a careful study of Todd's *variorum* edition, from which we found that we were acquiring a knowledge of every thing but Spenser. The labor of reading such an edition is great ; and we defy any mind, which is cast in the common mould of humanity, to form a just estimate of the poem on reading it for the first time, as the editor intended it should be read, with all the accompanying notes, each in its proper connexion. The American editor remarks in his Preface, that "the flavor of a fine passage is apt to evaporate while the reader is looking for the meaning of a word at the end of the volume, or perhaps in another book." The same remark applies to the reading of a long note, which introduces a variety of topics and leads the reader far away from the subject ; it is like the by-path, which attracted the son of Abensina from the main road of the journey of life till he was lost in the wilderness and gloom. To an ardent mind it is extremely provoking too, to be hurried off in the arms of a gigantic note, perhaps at the very moment when the favorite warrior is about to end a contest with some grim Saracen or portentous dragon, or when the gentle heroine is struggling against the violence of some ruthless insulter, and no hope of rescue at hand.

The efforts of a resolute reader of Todd, as he now skims along the smooth path of the text, and now plunges into the pitfall of some yawning note, remind us of the painful journey of man's great Enemy through the realms of Chaos ;

—— "Nigh foundered on he fares,

Treading the crude consistence, half on foot

Half flying ;

O'er bog, or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or rare,

With head, hands, wings, or feet pursues his way,

And swims, or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies."

The most objectionable, and, at the same time, to the reader who has a vein of sarcasm in him, the most amusing of the notes introduced into the *variorum* edition, are those which

trace and explain the classical allusions of Spenser. Among these are particularly to be distinguished the remarks of Upton and of Thomas Warton ; both men of great learning, but both essentially pedants. We shall presently favor our readers with a few specimens of this class of comments ; we wish, however, first to state distinctly our opinion, that, although an infinite fund of pedantry has been exhausted by writers on Spenser, the poet himself is not to be charged with the same weakness.

What is but common and general knowledge in one age, is rare learning in another. The study of antiquities, for instance, is confined to a few scholars ; men of books, who spend their life in the pursuit. In the branch to which these men devote themselves, they become, in the common acceptation of the word, learned ; they rise to a certain eminence ; their works are consulted with respect ; they are revered as the expounders of manners and customs, of forms of life, and of the spirit of society in days long gone by. Yet there is no doubt, that the most uninstructed laborer who toiled in the streets in those ancient times, could he now be summoned from the grave, would prove on the same subjects vastly more learned than the most erudite of our antiquaries.

The same comparison, in a degree at least, may be made between Spenser and his commentators with regard to a display of classical learning. It must be remembered, that in the days of our poet the literature of Greece and Rome reigned almost alone in the world ; he who could not read those languages must go without reading. The whole library of English literature in the time of Queen Elizabeth might be contained in less space than the periodical journals of England for a single year would now occupy. The consequence was, that all who were taught any thing of good learning, were taught Latin and Greek ; the classic literature, and the fables of its mythology were nearly as well known in good society in Spenser's time as the works of Pope, Johnson, or Addison, perhaps we might even say of Scott, Byron, or Wordsworth, are at present.

Allusions, therefore, to the Greek and Latin classics were at that time no more pedantic than quotations now are from familiar writers. And it is observable, that, wherever Spenser has occasion to make such allusions, it is done in an easy, careless manner, such as would be expected in one who

is using knowledge perfectly familiar to himself, and not less familiar to those he is addressing. And we see nothing of that affectation of scrupulous exactness in these allusions, which is observable in those who, at a later period, feel that their reputation for learning would be endangered by a slight misquotation, by a miscalling of names, or a different rendering of some mythological tale. Spenser wears the armour of the classics with the ease and freedom of one who has worn it from childhood, and who has seen it worn by every one about him. His commentators are decked in the same garb, but wear it as those who are dressed after a book ; with scrupulous correctness, and a strict regard to the most authentic works on antiquities, but rather stiffly and awkwardly withal ; somewhat, we fancy, as the knights of Eglintoun appeared in the mail of their ancestors.

Spenser was undoubtedly a finished classical scholar, more deeply read in Greek and Roman literature than most of his contemporaries, who were not professed students ; but there is no parade of learning in his works. He never makes classical allusions but when they serve to illustrate or adorn his poem ; he never goes out of the way in search of a learned figure or idea. His writings are essentially classical, because they are formed upon the only model of his time ; which was the literature of the ancients. His references are made to the only reading of the polite society of his age. His allusions, though classical, were at the same time popular ; they called up familiar images, associations, and reminiscences ; they appealed to a universal taste ; they vibrated on well-known chords.

As far as he was able to do it, Spenser made use of the literature which had sprung up since the revival of learning. Chaucer, Tasso, and Ariosto, were perfectly familiar to him ; but the gorgeous structure of modern literature, was, in his time, but rising from its foundations ; and the workmen had no model to guide them but those precious remains which time had spared from the classic ages. Accordingly, the poems, both Italian and English, of the sixteenth century, remind us of some of the churches in modern Rome, which have been reared on the site, and adorned with the columns and tablets, of the classic temples ; their form and arrangement are Christian, but much of the detail, and of their richest ornament, is borrowed from a polished antiquity.

Spenser, therefore, though deeply imbued with classical elegance, is not liable, in any degree, to the charge of pedantry. But what shall we say of a commentator who introduces his remarks upon the writings of our poet, with the following quotation? "It is a misfortune, as Mr. Waller observes, which attends the writers of English poetry, that they can hardly expect their works should last long in a tongue which is daily changing; that, whilst they are new, envy is apt to prevail against them; and, as that wears off, our language itself fails. Our poets, therefore, he says, should imitate judicious statuary, that choose the most durable materials, and should carve in Latin and Greek, if they would have their labors preserved for ever." And this nonsense was actually served up to the public, in a popular edition of Spenser, which appeared in London only half a century ago.

Upton, who was a hearty admirer of Spenser, rests his vindication of the merits of the "*Faerie Queene*" chiefly upon its resemblance to classical poems in Greek and Latin. Homer and Spenser, he tells us, have fallen under the same charge of want of unity. He then adds, "In every poem there ought to be simplicity and unity; and in the epic poem the unity of the action should never be violated by introducing any ill-joined or heterogeneous parts. This essential rule Spenser seems to me strictly to have followed; for what story can well be shorter or more simple than the subject of this poem? A British prince sees in a vision the Fairy Queen; he falls in love, and goes in search of this unknown fair, and at length finds her. This fable has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning is, the British prince saw in a vision the Fairy Queen, and fell in love with her; the middle, his search after her, with the adventures that he underwent; the end, his finding whom he sought." It may be doubted, whether Homer or Spenser is under the greater obligation for such a defence.

The same propensity to lift up Spenser on the shoulders of classic poets prevails throughout Upton's notes, as well as those of other commentators introduced into the *variorum* edition. So anxious, indeed, have many of these editors been to trace the beauties of our poet to a classic source, that we might almost assert, that there is not a single illustration, simile, or figure, in the whole of his works, for which

some prototype has not been discovered in ancient literature. A few specimens will suffice for our readers.

Spenser calls the children of Charissa, her "pledges dere." A form of expression, we should suppose, not very far-fetched, and not unbecoming to a person of our poet's tender sensibilities. A man who, like Spenser, died of a broken heart, caused chiefly by the loss of one of his children, would scarcely find a necessity to search antiquity for such a term of affection. We find, however, this note dryly appended. "'Pledges dere.' A Latinism, as Mr. Upton has observed, *pignora chara*." — Todd.

In the commencement of Book Second, the wizard Archimago is called, "that conning architect of cancred guyle." This expression draws forth the following note from Todd. "Gregory Nazianzen, it may be observed, denominates, in his tragedy of *Christus Patiens*, the old Dragon, ἀγκυλομήτης, 'fraudis artifex'; whence, perhaps, Spenser's *architect of guyle*, applied to the same deceiver."

The lame leg of Spenser's poor old hag, Occasion, is used by the commentators to make a delightful flourish. The lines describing the witch are,

"And him behind a wicked hag did stalke,
In ragged robes and filthy disaray ;
Her other leg was lame, that she no' te walke,
But on a staffe her feeble steps did stay."

This *other leg* is a charming bone to pick, and we have learning enough displayed upon the subject to drive an editor, in these degenerate days, to despair. We quote Upton's remarks.

"'Her other leg was lame.' Literally from Homer. Φολκὸς ἔην χολὸς δ' ἔΤΕΡΟΝ ΠΟΔΑ. Hesychius, Ἑτερον πόδα. Τὸν ἓνα πόδα, τὸν ἐνώνυμον, — alluding to this passage of Homer ; 'It means,' says Hesychius, 'One of his legs, or rather, his left leg.' The late learned editor of Hesychius did not see the allusion. Now ἕτερος is used sometimes for *left*, and what is left-handed is unlucky. See Pindar, Pyth. γ'. ver. 62.

Δαίμων δ' ἕτερος,
Ἐς κακὸν τρέψαις ἑδαμά-
σατό νιν.

“ So *ἐτέρα χεὶρ*, is the *left hand*, in Plato de Repub. p. 439. edit. H. Steph. Ἄλλη μὲν ἡ ἀπωθοῦσα χεὶρ, ἐτέρα δὲ ἡ προσάγο-
μένη. The picture of this *wicked hag* is the picture of *Occa-
sion* in Phædrus, which has likewise been noticed by the au-
thor of remarks on Spenser.

‘ Cursu ille volucris pendens in novacula,
Calvus, comosa fronte, nudo corpore,
Quem si occuparis, teneas ; elapsum semel
Non ipse possit Jupiter reprehendere,
Occasionem rerum significat brevem.
Effectus impediret ne segnis mora,
Finxere antiqui talem effigiem Temporis.’ ” — *Upton*.

Many readers would perhaps have been superficial enough to be satisfied with being informed, that “*other*,” as here used, is borrowed from classical expressions, signifying “*left*.”

In the eighth canto of Book Second, Spenser describes a battle between Prince Arthur and the two sons of Acrates, who, having found Sir Guyon in a swoon, were robbing him of his armour. The sword of the prince has been stolen some time before, and he has no weapon but his spear, which at length breaks. The Palmer, who was watching the conflict by the side of his master, Sir Guyon, seeing the danger of the prince, runs to him with the sword of the swooned knight, by the help of which Arthur easily conquers his foes. The story, as related by our poet, appears perfectly natural, and it seems no great stretch of fancy to provide this hero with a weapon, in the manner described. Not so thinks Upton ; common sense has nothing to do with it ; it was classical to arm a warrior in this way, otherwise, Spenser never would have dreamed of it. We have the following note. “ ‘ *Which when the Palmer saw.*’ Spenser here plainly had Homer in view, where Minerva gives Achilles his spear. Ἀΐδης δ’ ἔχτορα. *Il. x. 276. She gave him his sword so lightly that Hector knew not of it.* So Juturna gives Turnus his sword, who had broken his former sword on the Vulcanian arms of Æneas.” — *Upton*.

So we must imagine Spenser, in the course of composition, having arrived at the point where the prince’s spear breaks, and then rummaging over his Greek and Latin books to find out how to extricate the hero from his embarrassing situation.

Warton is thrown into great confusion by the poet's speaking of ordnance, and thinks it an error for which no excuse can possibly be found. His speculations are highly edifying. The passage which so much disturbs him is this ;

“And evermore their hideous ordinaunce
Upon the bulwarkes cruelly did play.”

On this he says, “Chaucer, in his description of the battle of Anthony and Cleopatra, mentions guns. Leg. of Cleop. ver. 58. Salvator Rosa has painted a cannon at the entrance of the tent of Holofernes. But these examples will not acquit Spenser. Ariosto was somewhat more cautious in this particular ; for though he supposes the use of firearms on a certain occasion in the age of Charlemagne, yet he prudently suggests that they were soon afterwards abolished, and that the use of them continued unknown for many years. He attributes the revival, no less than the invention, of these infernal engines, to the devil. C. xi. St. 22.”

Upton, however, finds an apology for his favorite in that never-failing magazine, his classical attainments. “Their *ordinaunce*,” he observes, “means battering engines ; such as are described in Lipsius ; these he calls *huge artillery*. Spenser poetically uses the word in its larger sense. ‘Tormenta inter *ordines* militares collocata’ ; so called from *ordinaire*, being placed in rows. We now confine its signification to cannon.”

This appears a tolerably satisfactory explanation. Todd, however, cannot resist the temptation to fire a shot out of these same cannon. He adds ; “In Barret’s Dict. 1580, Ordinance signifies generally, *instruments of war*. But the word appears to have been particularly applied to cannon in Spenser’s time. Thus Sir J. Harrington in his remarks on Ariosto’s guns ; ‘Virgil hath a verse in the sixth *Æneados*, which myself have wondered at many times, to see how plainly it expresseth the quality of a piece of ordnance. Dum flammas Jovis et sonitus imitatur Olympi.’”

There has been a vulgar idea, that poets are observers of nature ; and Spenser gives occasional reason to suspect that he had a taste for such beauty. It is possible, that living on the banks of the Mulla, he might have noticed the effect of moonlight on the water. If so, we should not be surprised at his writing,

“Upon the waves to spread her trembling light.”

Not at all ; Upton informs us how he thought of using the expression in this note. “ ‘ Il tremolante lume.’ — Ariost. *Orl. Fur.* C. 8. 71. ‘ Tremulum lumen.’ — Virg. *Æn.* 8. 22. ‘ Splendet tremulo sub lumine pontus.’ — *Æn.* 7. 9. Virgil took this expression from Ennius ;

‘ Lumine sic tremulo terra et cava cœrula candent.’ ”

But it is not enough, that Spenser had no ideas but those he borrowed from the ancients. Where he varies from classical forms, we are informed that he could not possibly have meant what he said ; there must be some mistake about it. Upon the line,

“ The power to rule the billowes, and the waves to tame,”

Upton has the following remarks. “ To *rule* the billowes and to *tame* the waves, is the same thing. I believe here is a false print, and that our poet wrote as the opposition requires, — ‘ The power to *raise* the billowes and the waves to tame.’ ” Spenser is classical in his expressions ; see Hor. *Od.* 3. l. i.

“ Quo non Arbiter Adriæ,
Major tollere seu ponere vult freta.”

And Virg. *Æn.* 1. 70 ;

“ Et mulcere dedit fluctus, et tollere vento.”

And Homer, *Od.* x. 22 ;

“ Ἡ μὲν ἸΑΤΕΜΕΝΑΙ ἡδὲ ΟΡΝΤΕΜΕΝ ὅν κ' ἐθέλῃσι.”

So above, *St.* 11 ;

“ That rules the seas and makes them rise and fall.”

And below, *St.* 52 ;

“ To rule his tides, and surges to up-rere.”

We shall have room for but one more extract, which, being a learned discussion upon the color of Cupid's dress, we hope will prove as interesting to our readers as it evidently was to that grave commentator, Thomas Warton. The importance of the subject well deserves the formidable array of learning which he brings forward to elucidate it.

In Canto Seventh of the “ Legend of Constance,” are these lines ;

“ But life was like a faire young lusty boy,
Such as they faine Dan Cupid to have beene,

Full of delightfull health and lively joy,
Deckt all with floures and wings of gold fit to employ.”

These lines elicit the following remarks from Warton.
“Chaucer thus represents Cupid, Rom. R. v. 890 ;

“ ‘ But of his robe to devise
I dread encumbered for to be ;
For not yclad in silk was he,
But all in floures and flourettes.’ ”

But the ancients have left us no authority for such a representation of Cupid. Our author, St. 34, above, gives him a green vest, which is equally unwarrantable, though Catullus has given him a yellow vest. — *Ad Manlium*. —

“ ‘ Quam circumcursans hinc illinc sæpe Cupido,
Fulgebat *crocina* candidus in tunica,’ —

where Scaliger remarks, from Julius Pollux, that Sappho attributes a purple vest to this deity ; but, according to the general sense in which *πορφύρεος* is sometimes used, she may probably mean a rich mantle.”

We have cited these comments from the *variorum* edition for several purposes. In the first place, our object was to show the importance of a new and more judicious edition of Spenser, if the work is ever destined to be popular. Hitherto, the choice for readers has been between such an edition as that of Todd, (for the various labors of Church, Hughes, and Upton partake of the same character,) and an edition like Pickering’s, with no other explanations than a glossary attached to the last volume, which is but little better than no glossary at all. With such means for reading Spenser, it amounted almost to a moral impossibility, that he should be generally relished or even understood.

The Boston edition supplies this want. It is learned without being pedantic, and concise without being obscure. The introduction, by the editor, is an extremely attractive essay. Without any parade of learning, it gives evidence of an acquaintance with all that has been written on the subject. The writer does not, like the older commentators, lay bare to us all the foundations of his knowledge. He simply rears his superstructure before our eyes ; but the work stands so firmly, and its proportions are so complete, that we perceive at once that it is built upon a solid rock of learning, and that

the plan and elevation were deliberately and carefully devised and matured before the structure was raised.

As a critique upon Spenser, the Introduction seems to us extremely just. Though it is written by an evident admirer of the poet, it is discriminating, cool, and impartial ; the literary faults of the author are not glossed over or palliated, and the beauties of the style and sentiment are brought out in a strong light, with taste and eloquence. As a composition, the Introduction is entitled to high praise. The style is flowing, harmonious, and impressive ; and no man of taste or talent can rise from its perusal without an increased relish for the poet, and a stronger desire to enjoy his beauties.

The notes occupy no more space than is absolutely necessary for explaining the text, excepting that, in a few places, the poem seems to extort from the editor a burst of admiration, in which he cannot forbear calling upon his readers to sympathize with him. The glossary is printed at the bottom of each page in such a manner, that a single glance will explain to the reader the signification of the word in question. This will be found a very great improvement upon the plan usually adopted, of printing the glossary at the close of the work.

It is not going too far, we believe, to assert, that any reader of common intelligence will understand Spenser quite as well, and enjoy his reading infinitely more, in this edition than in any which has appeared before it.

Our object, in the second place, in quoting the remarks of various commentators which are collected in the *variorum* edition, has been, to present to our readers a specimen of the best criticism upon Spenser, during the greater portion of the eighteenth century. With regard to this poet, Todd's edition may be considered as closing one epoch of criticism ; it is the exponent of a class of commentators. His own remarks differ little in character from those of Church, Upton, Hughes, or Warton. As a commentator he belongs to the last century rather than the present. If his language were only a little less modern, he might easily be mistaken for a contemporary of Colman or Thornton. And his edition of Spenser belongs essentially to the class of literature which seems to have been his model.

A new era of criticism has already commenced. The style is changed ; more enlarged views are entertained ; a different

and higher taste prevails ; learning is stripped of pedantry, and made to clothe itself in the garb of common sense. We are of opinion, that Spenser is better understood and more justly appreciated at present, than he has been at any time since the days of Queen Elizabeth. In this respect, we must venture to differ from an accomplished writer of the present day in England.

“The admiration of this great poem,” says Mr. Hallam,* speaking of the “*Faerie Queene*,” “was unanimous and enthusiastic. No academy had been trained to carp at his genius with minute cavilling ; no recent popularity, no traditional fame, (for Chaucer was rather venerated than much in the hands of the reader,) interfered with the immediate recognition of his supremacy. The ‘*Faerie Queene*’ became, at once, the delight of every accomplished gentleman, the model of every poet, the solace of every scholar. In the course of the next century, by the extinction of habits derived from chivalry, and the change, both of taste and language, which came on with the civil wars and the Restoration, Spenser lost something of his attraction and much more of his influence over literature ; yet, in the most phlegmatic temper of the general reader, he seems to have been one of our most popular writers. Time, however, has gradually wrought its work ; and, notwithstanding the more imaginative cast of poetry in the present century, it may be well doubted, whether the ‘*Faerie Queene*’ is as much read, or as highly esteemed, as in the days of Anne.”

The literary taste of England, which had been perverted and dazzled by the splendor of the age of Louis the Fourteenth, and degraded by the profane and ribald spirit of the court of Charles the Second, began to rise, in the days of Anne, from the infamy into which it had been plunged. The criticisms of Addison upon Milton, and of Hughes upon Spenser, in the “*Spectator*,” and the paraphrase of the story of Amoret, in the “*Tattler*,” all published within the first fifteen years of Anne’s reign, show a great advance in the taste for English literature beyond the preceding century. Dryden, who was the boldest defender of Spenser in his time, if not the only critic who dared to praise him at all, says, “His obsolete language, and the ill choice of his stanza,

* *Introduction to the Literature of Europe in the 15th, 16th, and 17th Centuries.*

are faults but of the second magnitude ; for notwithstanding the first, he is still intelligible, at least after a little practice ; and for the last, he is the more to be admired, that, laboring under such a difficulty, his verses are so numerous, so various, and so harmonious, that only Virgil, whom he professedly imitated, has surpassed him among the Romans, and only Mr. Waller among the English." It would be difficult, in the range of our literature, to select a passage which condenses more bad taste than this. The praise bestowed by a critic, who speaks of "*the ill choice*" of the Spenserian stanza, and who ranks Waller above Ben Jonson, Shakspeare, and Milton, loses all value.

The relative merits of our poets began to be better understood in the succeeding century ; Waller was no longer accounted the first of English versifiers, nor Milton looked upon as a monstrous and unintelligible compound of Puritanism, chivalry, and classic erudition. It was discovered, that high treason was committed against Nature, when Bullock or Penkethman attempted to "mend a noble play of Shakspeare or Jonson ;" that Spenser's style "is very poetical," "his words are all true English and numbers exquisite ;" that there is "great justness and variety" in his epithets ; and that he had "an admirable talent in representations" of allegorical characters. The essay of Hughes upon allegorical poetry, and his remarks on the "*Faerie Queene*," contain many just and sensible observations ; though at the same time they prove plainly enough, that that writer was incapable of forming a proper estimate of the merits of the poem. They do not reach the higher walks of criticism ; they discuss the outward form and model of the poem ; the fertility and richness of imagination it displays ; its resemblance to classical poems, and to the poems of Italy ; the impropriety of laying the scene in Fairy land ; of introducing Fairies as large as human beings, and of confounding the two together, and of representing Arthur as only a private gentleman and a minor, instead of giving us a portion of his history as a king. But there is no attempt made in this critique to analyze the various leading characters ; to measure the depth of the poet's wisdom ; the sound tone of morals which pervades the work ; the power of thought displayed ; the pathos, the tenderness, delicacy, refinement, and loveliness, and at the same time the individuality and distinctness, of the heroines ; the different kinds of strength and valor which mark the heroes ; — these

pass almost utterly unnoticed by Hughes. Mr. Hallam would surely rank the critique in "*Blackwood*," which he praises so highly, far above any thing that was written about Spenser in the days of Anne. For ourselves, we should consider his own condensed and excellent remarks upon the "*Faerie Queene*" as indicating a far more just appreciation of the old poet, than any period of the eighteenth century could boast of.

The critical writings of the last century abound in notices of Spenser ; but we know of none on the whole, which seem to rate him so highly as he is regarded by the writers of the present day. Johnson wrote an essay in the "*Rambler*" upon the danger and impropriety of imitating Spenser ; he observes, "To imitate the fictions and sentiments of Spenser can incur no reproach, for allegory is, perhaps, one of the most pleasing vehicles for instruction. But I am very far from extending the same respect to his diction or his stanza. His style was, in his own time, allowed to be vicious, so darkened with old words and peculiarities of phrase, and so remote from common use, that Jonson boldly pronounces him to have written no language. His stanza is at once difficult and unpleasing ; tiresome to the ear by its uniformity, and to the attention by its length. Perhaps, however, the style of Spenser might by long labor be justly copied ; but life is surely given us for higher purposes, than to gather what our ancestors have wisely thrown away, and to learn what is of no value but because it has been forgotten."

Johnson undoubtedly had reason for giving this caution ; a better taste was apparently springing up with regard to English literature ; and the autocratic Doctor might have felt, perhaps, that, with the growth of more pure and liberal criticism, his own influence in the republic of letters would be lessened. We learn from a paper published in the "*Connoisseur*," about the same time with the above remarks of Johnson, that the attention of literary men was beginning to be directed to the purification of the language. "A friend of mine," says this writer, "lately gave me an account of a set of gentlemen, who meet together once a week under the name of the English Club. The title with which they dignify their society, arises from the chief end of their meeting, which is to cultivate their mother tongue. They employ half the time of their assembling in hearing some of our best classics read to them, which generally furnishes them with conversation for the rest of the evening. They have instituted annual festivals in honor of Spenser, Shakspeare, Milton, &c., in each of

which, an oration, interspersed with encomiums on the English language, is spoken in praise of the author, who, in the phrase of the Almanac, gives the red letter to the day. They have established a fund from which handsome rewards are allotted to those, who shall supply the place of any exotic terms, that have been smuggled into our language, by home-spun British words equally significant and expressive. Their proceedings, it must, however, be confessed, are somewhat unfashionable, for the English tongue is become as little the general care as English beef or English honesty."

Goldsmith, however, with all his fine genius, failed to discover the merits of Spenser. In his review of Church's edition, he remarks; "It is, it must be owned, somewhat surprising, that Spenser, who was so well acquainted with Virgil, should not have adopted the Eneid of the Roman poet, rather than the *Romans* of the *Wises* and *Jongleurs*, his more immediate predecessors. It is true, he has endeavoured to soften this defect by forming his work into an allegory; however, the pleasure we receive from this species of composition, though never so finely balanced between truth and fiction, is but of a subordinate nature, as we have always two passions opposing each other; a love of reality, which represses the flights of fancy; and a passion for the marvellous, which would leave reflection behind." Goldsmith seems, however, to have had some dawning notion, that Spenser was not appreciated as he ought to be. A ray of light, perhaps, did now and then shoot from that sun of brightness, and pierce the murky clouds which were rolling up from the earth, and obscuring the heavens, and a vague promise of a brighter day did sometimes cheer the hearts of the prophets of those times.

Later than the middle of the eighteenth century, we find Hume publishing these remarks upon Spenser. "This poet contains great beauties, a sweet and harmonious versification, easy elocution, and a fine imagination. Yet does the perusal of his work become so tedious, that one never finishes it from the mere pleasure which it affords; it soon becomes a kind of task reading; and it requires some effort and resolution to carry us on to the end of his long performance." "The tediousness of continued allegory, and that too, seldom striking or ingenious, has also contributed to render the 'Faerie Queene' peculiarly tiresome; not to mention the too great frequency of its descriptions, and the languor of its stanza. Upon the whole, Spenser maintains his place upon the shelves among

our English classics ; but he is seldom seen on the table ; and there is scarcely any one, if he dares to be ingenuous, but will confess, that, notwithstanding all the merit of the poet, he affords an entertainment with which the palate is soon satiated."

The noblest tribute that was offered to the memory of Spenser during the eighteenth century, was undoubtedly Thomson's imitation of the "Faerie Queene," the "Castle of Indolence." Shenstone adopted the same stanza, and affected something of the antique style in his "School Mistress." Beattie used the Spenserian stanza in his "Minstrel," though in other respects the poem can scarcely be called an imitation. The "Castle of Indolence," in style and spirit, approaches the "Faerie Queene" much nearer than the poems of Shenstone and Beattie. Yet no one can compare the two without instantly feeling the immeasurable superiority of the old bard of chivalry. Thomson's imitation of Spenser reminds us of the mimic sounds of a theatre compared with the burst of a martial band echoing among the rocks and hills, or the full swell of a cathedral organ. It is delightful, and we wish for nothing better till we listen to the original. Shenstone's "School Mistress," as a poem, is agreeable, fanciful, and interesting ; as an imitation of Spenser, it is beneath notice. A better taste would lead to the adoption of the stanza without any pretence at imitation. This Burns has done in his "Cotter's Saturday Night." This is no imitation. The stanza is no departed form, raised from the grave and galvanized into life, again, when its purpose is accomplished, to sink in death. Burns uses the stanza as if he had created it. It ought not to be called Spenserian in his hands, for it has nothing of Spenser but the number and arrangement of lines and rhymes ; it is not merely inspired with life, it *is* life ; the rolling and ethereal mist of words, like the delicate vapor, that assumed by degrees the form of the White Lady of Avenel, gracefully gathers into fair proportions, and beams upon us with the radiance of Genius.

We are well aware, that praise and admiration go a good deal by fashion. A few leading minds, in every community, give the watchword to the rest ; and it may undoubtedly be asserted with truth, that there is no absurdity so monstrous, that it may not become the rage, if a few men of genius are determined that it shall. There are fashions in literature as in

every thing else ; sometimes they are in good taste, but, when otherwise, there is always this comfort, that they are sure to be followed by a reaction.

It is possible, therefore, that the admiration which is expressed of late years for Spenser, may be a mere fashion ; but we are more inclined to believe, that it is the sober judgment of an age of sound criticism, of better morals, and of a more elevated taste.

At all events, such is the judgment of the age. The Spenserian stanza has been used by a throng of writers, from the humble aspirant to a place in the "poet's corner" of a newspaper, up to the sublime and lonely Byron. A host of critics have been busy in sounding the praises of the old poet ; beautiful editions of his works have been published, and, what is more important, there is good reason to believe that they have been read. And Spenser is now universally acknowledged, both in England and in this country, to belong to the first class of poets.

ART. VIII. — *A New Home ; Who'll Follow ? or, Glimpses of Western Life*. By MRS. MARY CLAVERS, an Actual Settler. New York : C. S. Francis. 12mo. pp. 317.

WE do not know whether Clavers is an assumed or a real name ; but we are certain, that the book which bears it will confer on its author no unenviable reputation. It is a work of striking merit ; such as we do not often meet with in these days of repetition and imitation. The author is a person who sees for herself, and understands what she sees. She has the happy art of representing what she undertakes to describe, with a fidelity and reality, which at once fix the reader's attention, and make him feel, that no common intellectual power is at work. With literary accomplishments, and a capacity for enjoying all the pleasures of refined society, she has gone into the western wilds, and shown us what are the resources and the enjoyments of the backwoodsman. In doing this, she spreads no romantic coloring over the scenes she describes ; she has no paradise to offer him